Seven-day Week Lunch Menu Planning Checklist for Grades K-8 Option in the National School Lunch Program

School Year 2026-27 (July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027)

This checklist assists school food authorities (SFAs) with planning meals to meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) optional seven-day meal pattern for grades K-8. For information on the NSLP meal patterns, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) resources, *Overview of Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program* and *Guide to the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*, and visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage. For information on the crediting requirements, visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage and Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

> SFAs must serve at least the minimum daily and weekly amount of each meal component. Larger amounts may be offered if the weekly lunch menu does not exceed the weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium.

Instructions: Check (X) each box below to indicate if the lunch menu complies with each requirement. If any boxes are not checked, review the lunch menu and revise accordingly to ensure it complies with the NSLP meal pattern requirements.

Lunch

- ☐ Each lunch includes the five meal components: meats/meat alternates, grains, fruits, vegetables, and milk.

Meats/Meat Alternates (MMA) Component

- ☐ Each lunch includes at least 1 ounce equivalent (oz eq) of MMA.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least 12½ oz eq of MMA.
- ☐ The MMA is served in a main dish, or a main dish and one other item.

For guidance on the MMA component, visit the "Meats and Meat Alternates" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Grains Component

- ☐ Each lunch includes at least 1 oz eq of grains.

- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least 11 oz eq of grains.
- ☐ At least 80 percent of the grain menu items offered during the week are whole grain-rich (WGR), based on the total oz eq of all offered grains. The remaining grain menu items are enriched and do not exceed 20 percent.
- ☐ Grain-based desserts do not exceed 2 oz eq per week.

For guidance on the grains component, visit the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Fruits Component

- ☐ Each lunch includes at least ½ cup of fruit.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least 3½ cups of fruit.
- ☐ Fruit juices are 100 percent juice and do not exceed half of the weekly offered fruits. *Indicate "NA" (not applicable) if the menu does not include fruit juices.*
- ☐ Dried fruits are credited as twice the amount served, i.e., ¼ cup of raisins credits as ½ cup of the fruits component.

For guidance on the fruits component, visit the "Fruits" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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Vegetables Component

- ☐ Each meal includes at least ¾ cup of vegetables.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least 3¾ cups of vegetables.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu provides all five vegetable subgroups:
  - ☐ **Dark green:** at least ½ cup is offered weekly
  - ☐ **Red/orange:** at least ¾ cup is offered weekly
  - ☐ **Beans, peas, and lentils:** at least ½ cup is offered weekly
  - ☐ **Starch**y: at least ½ cup is offered weekly
  - ☐ **Other:** at least ½ cup is offered weekly (or dark green, red/orange, beans/peas/lentils, or starchy)
  - ☐ At least 2½ cups of **additional vegetables** are offered weekly (may be from any of the five vegetable subgroups)
- ☐ Vegetable juices are 100 percent juice and do not exceed half of the weekly offered vegetables. *Indicate "NA" if the menu does not include vegetable juices.*
- ☐ Raw leafy greens are credited as half of the amount served, i.e., 1 cup of lettuce or spinach credits as ½ cup of the vegetables component.

For guidance on the vegetables component, visit the "Vegetables" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Milk Component

- ☐ includes at least 1 cup of milk. The allowable types of milk include unflavored or flavored whole milk, reduced-fat (2%) milk, low-fat (1%) milk, and fat-free milk.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least 7 cups of milk.
- ☐ Flavored milk does not exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces.
- ☐ Lunch menus offer at least two different varieties of milk each day, including at least one unflavored choice.
- ☐ Optional fluid milk substitutes (nondairy beverages) for nondisability reasons: If the SFA offers nondairy beverages like fortified soy milk, they meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes (7 CFR 210.10(d)(2)(ii)). For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs*.

For guidance on the milk component, visit the "Milk" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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Offer versus Serve (OVS)

Indicate "NA" if the school does not implement OVS.

- ☐ Students select at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable for a reimbursable meal.
- ☐ In addition to at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable, students select the full portion of at least two other components for a reimbursable meal.

For guidance on OVS, refer to the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals* and visit the CSDE's Offer versus Serve for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Dietary Specifications (Nutrition Standards) for Weekly Menus

Note: SFAs are not required to conduct a nutrient analysis of menus. If applicable, the CSDE will conduct a nutrient analysis during the Administrative Review of the school nutrition programs. *Indicate "NK" (not known) if the SFA does not conduct a nutrient analysis.*

- ☐ Calories are within the allowable range of 600-650 calories.
- ☐ Saturated fat is less than 10 percent of total calories.
- ☐ Sodium does not exceed 1,110 milligrams (target 1A through June 30, 2027).

For guidance on the dietary specifications, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12* and visit the "Dietary Specifications" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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Menu Planning Resources

Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/milk_substitutes_snp.pdf

Calculating the Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/calculate_wgr_percentage_snp.pdf

Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs

Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_grain_based_desserts_grades_k-12_nslp_sbp.pdf

Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_crediting_snp.pdf

Crediting Summary Charts for the Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/crediting_summary_charts_snp.pdf

Dietary Specifications (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs/dietary-specificationsprograms/documents#DietarySpecifications

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):
https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutrition-programs

Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/grain_oz_eq_snp.pdf

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Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/guide_wgr_requirement_snp_grades_k-12.pdf

Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_menu_documentation_snp.pdf

Guide to the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_meal_patterns_nslp_sbp_k12.pdf

Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/meal_pattern/resources_school_meal_patterns_snp.pdf

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs

Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning-guidance-for-school-meals

Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/offer-versus-serve-for-school-nutrition-programs

Overview of Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/overview_menu_planning_nslp_grades_k-12.pdf

Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/program-guidance-school-nutrition-programs

Sodium Limits for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/sodium_limits_nslp_sbp.pdf

USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/wmfhka-implementation

Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/vegetable_subgroups_nslp.pdf

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For more information, visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage and Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage or contact the school nutrition programs staff at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/nslp_menu_checklist_7day_grades_K-8_option.pdf.

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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